

Ways of Forming Words in Present-Day English

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Abstract: The article illustrates the point when in two languages we find no trace of the exchange of loanwords one way or other we are safe to infer that the two nations have had nothing to do with each other, but if they have been in contact, the number of the loan– words and still more the quality of the loanwords, if rightly interpreted, will inform us of their reciprocal relations, they will show us which of them has been the more fertile in ideas and on what domains of human activity each has been superior of the other.

Keywords: word–building ways, affixation, term, meaning, productivity, derivational means, English lexicology.

Some of the ways of forming words in present–day English can be restored to for the creation of new words whenever the occasion demands – these are called productive ways of forming words, other ways of forming words cannot now produce new words, and these are commonly termed non-productive or unproductive. R. S. Ginzburg gives the example of affixation having been a productive way of forming new words ever since the Old English period; on the other hand, sound–interchange must have been at one time a word-building means but in Modern English (as we have mentioned above) its function is actually only to distinguish between different classes and forms of words.

It follows that productivity of word–building ways, individual derivational patterns and derivational affixes are understood as their ability of making new words which all who speak English find no difficulty in understanding, in particular their ability to create what are called occasional words or nonce–words¹ (e.g. *lungful* (of smoke), *Dickensish* (office), *collarless* (appearance)). The term suggests that a speaker coins such words when he needs them; if on another occasion the same word is needed again, he coins it afresh. Nonce–words are built from familiar language material after familiar patterns. Dictionaries, as a rule, do not list occasional words.

The delimitation between productive and non–productive ways and means of word–formation as stated above is not, however, accepted by all linguists without reserve. Some linguists consider it necessary to define the term productivity of a word–building means more accurately. They hold the view that productive ways and means of word–formation are only those that can be used for the formation of an unlimited number of new words in the modern language, i.e. such means that “know no bounds” and easily form occasional words. This divergence of opinion is responsible for the difference in the lists of derivational affixes considered productive in various books on English lexicology.

Nevertheless, recent investigations seem to prove that productivity of derivational means is relative in many respects. Moreover, there are no absolutely productive means; derivational patterns and derivational affixes possess different degrees of productivity. Therefore, it is important that conditions favoring productivity and the degree if productivity of a particular pattern or affix should be established. All derivational patterns experience both structural and

¹ Арнольд И.В. Лексикология современного английского языка. – М.: Высш. шк. 1986. – с. 249.

semantic constraints. The fewer are the constraints, the higher is the degree of productivity, and the greater is the number of new words built on it. The two general constraints imposed on all derivational patterns are: the part of speech in which the pattern functions and the meaning attached to it which conveys the regular semantic correlation between the two classes of words. It follows that each part of speech is characterized by a set of productive derivational patterns peculiar to it. Three degrees of productivity are distinguished for derivational patterns and individual derivational affixes: (1) highly productive, (2) productive or semi-productive and (3) non-productive.

R. S. Ginzburg² says that productivity of derivational patterns and affixes should not be identified with the frequency of occurrence in speech, although there may be some interrelation between them. Frequency of occurrence is characterized by the fact that a great number of words containing a given derivational affix are often used in speech, in particular in various texts. Productivity is characterized by the ability of a given suffix to make new words.

In linguistic literature there is another interpretation of derivational productivity based on a quantitative approach. A derivational pattern or a derivational affix are qualified as productive provided there are in the word-stock dozens and hundreds of derived words built on the pattern or with the help of the suffix in question. Thus interpreted, derivational productivity is distinguished from word-formation activity by which is meant the ability of an affix to produce new words, in particular occasional words or nonce-words. For instance, the agent suffix *-er* is to be qualified both as a productive and as an active suffix: on the one hand, the English word-stock possesses hundreds of nouns containing this suffix (e.g. *writer, reaper, lover, runner*, etc.), on the other hand, the suffix *-er* in the pattern $v + -er \rightarrow N$ is freely used to coin an unlimited number of nonce-words denoting active agents (e.g. *interrupter, respecter, laugher, breakfaster*, etc.).

The adjective suffix *-ful* is described as a productive but not as an active one, for there are hundreds of adjectives with this suffix (e.g. *beautiful, hopeful, useful*, etc.), but no new words seem to be built with its help.

Now let us consider the basic ways of forming words in the English language.

Affixation is generally defined as the formation of words by adding derivational affixes to different types of bases. Derived words formed by affixation may be the result of one or several applications of word-formation rule and thus the stems of words making up a word-cluster enter into derivational relations of different degrees. The zero degree of derivation is ascribed to simple words, i.e. words whose stem is homonymous with a word-form and often with a root-morpheme, (e.g. *atom, haste, devote, anxious, horror*, etc.).

LIST OF USED LITERATURE

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2. Haldeman S. S. *Affixes in their origin and application, exhibiting the etymologic structure of English words*. – Philadelphia: E. H. Butler, 1865.
3. Jespersen Otto. *Growth and Structure of the English Language*. – Oxford, 1982.

² Арнольд И.В. Лексикология современного английского языка. – М.: Высш. шк., 1986. – с. 249.